

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH CAPTAIN CYNTHIA THEBAUD,  
COMMODORE, DESTROYER SQUADRON 60, AFRICA PARTNERSHIP STATION VIA TELECONFERENCE  
FROM THE USS NASHVILLE TIME: 8:59 A.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2009

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for  
Public Affairs): I'd like to welcome everyone to the Department of Defense's  
Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, March 18, 2009. My name is Lieutenant  
Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs  
and I'll be moderating the call today.

A note to our bloggers on the line today: Please clearly state your  
name and blog or organization you're with prior to your question.

Today, our guest is Captain Cynthia Thebaud. She's actually the  
commodore for Destroyer Squadron 60 aboard USS Nashville conducting Africa  
Partnership Station.

With that, ma'am, the floor is yours. I'll turn it over to you if  
you'd like to start with an opening statement. CAPT. THEBAUD: Okay. Before we  
get going, I also want to confirm the people I think are on from the  
bloggers' line are Mr. Jim Dolbow, David Axe and Chuck Simmins. Is that  
correct?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, ma'am. They're all present and accounted for.

CAPT. THEBAUD: Okay. And is there anybody else?

LT. CRAGG: No, we're waiting on Beth Wilson. As I had stated, she's  
calling in from California. So if for some reason she doesn't call, I'll  
contact her, if she has any follow-on questions. Is that okay?

CAPT. THEBAUD: Okay. For opening, I think everybody has some  
background on APS, which is what we started with when we tried to do this two  
days ago. But I'd just like to quickly review the points that we had made  
there, that Africa Partnership Station is an initiative -- a multi-national,  
multi-organizational initiative -- under the auspices of Naval Forces Europe and  
Africa, which is located in Naples, Italy.

This initiative has been ongoing for a number of years, and evolved out  
of a number of maritime security sector conferences that various U.S. Navy  
leaders had attended. And trying to develop some concepts of ways forward in  
helping to enhance and develop maritime safety and security capability and  
capacity in West and Central Africa is really the genesis of this initiative.

The first official APS deployment was done with USS Fort McHenry and USS Swift last year, and involved those two ships going to a number of different countries in West and Central Africa with a multi-national staff and team onboard and a multi-national group of trainers, and was working on initiatives in the maritime sector that are important in four key areas, or key aspects, of the maritime sector: helping them develop maritime professionals; helping them to develop a maritime domain, or a special regional awareness; helping to develop response capability and capacity; and helping to develop the infrastructure.

The best known aspects of APS are certainly these big deployments, like was done with Fort McHenry and Swift, and is now being done with Nashville. But the APS mission is really a concept, and occurs in a number of other venues with other individual ship deployments. And you've had aircraft doing work in the maritime domain, helping to develop concepts, capabilities and capacity. We have construction engineers, Navy Seabee battalions, in various countries doing some infrastructure work and training, cooperative training, and capability development in countries periodically -- so all of which support this APS concept. We deployed out of Norfolk, Virginia in mid-January this year and spent our first visit -- (audio break) -- just over a week. (Extended audio break) --

LT. CRAGG: Ma'am, if you can hear me -- (audio break) -- didn't catch the last part that was said. So if possible, just restate it so we'll hear you correctly. (Pause.) Chuck, David and Jim, are you all three still on the line?

Q I'm here. It's Jim.

Q Yes, still here.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. For some reason -- (audio break) -- likely they will call back -- (audio break) -- she sounded really clear in the beginning, so hopefully -- (audio break) -- call back -- (audio break).

(High whine on line.)

Q Is everyone hearing that?

Q Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: I am hearing that. Do you all want to hang up and call back in?

Q Okay.

Q Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Okay.

(Extended pause.)

STAFF: Okay. (Inaudible) -- ship line up and running again. So we're going to head back down to the commodore's cabin, and she'll redial in.

LT. CRAGG: Mine sounds perfect, so we'll go ahead and start back when you guys call back in.

STAFF: Okay. Thank you. LT. CRAGG: Okay, David and Jim, we're going to make this work.

Q Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Thanks for your persistence.

Q No problem.

(Pause.)

LT. CRAGG: So, you guys still on the line?

Q I am, yeah.

LT. CRAGG: Jim, and then David? LT. CRAGG: Good morning. We hear you loud and clear.

LT. CRAGG: Perfect. Well, what we'll do, we'll turn it back over to the commodore.

I believe -- I think she broke off when she was talking about when APS was first started. I think that's where she left off. Unless --

STAFF: Did you get to the four key areas?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, if you want to start from there.

STAFF: Did she -- we did get the four key areas.

LT. CRAGG: Yes.

STAFF: Did you get the part when she went into the -- (inaudible) -- the APS conflict and she listed the ports that we'll be visiting?

LT. CRAGG: I didn't hear that port -- that part. So if --

STAFF: Okay.

LT. CRAGG: -- you'd like to go --

STAFF: So we'll just pick it up after the four key areas, where she goes into the countries that we're going to be visiting.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Roger that.

STAFF: All right. Thank you so much. And with that -- without further ado, here is Commodore Cindy Thebaud.

CAPT. THEBAUD: Well, great. So I understand -- now, I am not on the speaker. So as questions come up, what I will do is just relay them so the people here will hear them.

As I was saying, we left in mid-December and spent about a week in Dakar, Senegal, followed by about two-and-a-half weeks in Sekondi in Ghana. Sekondi is where their main naval operations base is located. Now in Lagos for about -- (audio break).

One of the big differences here is the expansion of countries involved and the size of the staff and the interest they've shown, involvement in this mission. This year, we've had representation from 20 different countries on the staff and as trainers, facilitating seminars, workshops, lectures and courses and so on, including 10 different African countries, 9 of which are from West and Central Africa and then also Kenya.

Because as I know David is aware from a couple of his recent articles, APS, interest in APS is expanding. And countries in East Africa are saying, we want an APS coming to us. And Kenya's participation, I think, is an indication of that.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, ma'am. If you're done, we'll go ahead and turn it over to Jim. Is that okay, ma'am?

CAPT. THEBAUD: Absolutely.

(Cross talk.)

Q Good evening, Captain. Jim Dolbow with the Naval Institute Blog.

What are some of your lessons learned that will be able to be passed on to future APS missions?

(Cross talk.)

CAPT. THEBAUD: What are the lessons learned that will be able to be passed on to future APS missions?

I think one of the critical benefits to working here is the involvement of partner nations in the planning process. And I also have with me Commander Mark Fitzsimmons, my director of staff. I had hoped also to have Commander Enoch Bello, who's our deputy for maritime engagement. He's a Nigerian officer. And he ended up going back over to the Nigerian bases, to do some interface over there. One of the bigger lessons learned is the importance -- I mean, we knew this, and it was reinforced, essentially reconfirming initial first impressions -- is the importance of the partnership and cooperative dialogue in developing the deployment itself: where we are going, the duration of the visits, what will be done in each visit and also the importance of the multinational aspect of the staff and also our embarked training program.

One of the things that we hear said the most frequently is the benefit (afforded/for the ?) various participants: the opportunity to come and work in a collaborative and cooperative environment with members of other west and central African navies.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Chuck, we'll come back to you. Let's go to David.  
Q Great. Thanks. Can everyone hear me okay?

LT. CRAGG: Loud and clear, David.

CAPT. THEBAUD: Mark, do you have anything else you wanted to add on lessons learned that'll be of use and benefit to --

CMDR. MARK FITZSIMMONS (staff director): (Off mike.)

CAPT. THEBAUD: Okay. Well, if you have anything else, you know. Okay.

Q Thank you, Captain.

CAPT. THEBAUD: I think the other thing I would add -- and I think you're aware -- Center for Naval Analysis is again this year doing assessment work in conjunction with members of the APS staff and people from Naval Forces Europe and Africa. And the lessons learned that come out of that will also be important in shaping the continued way forward.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. David, go ahead with your question.

Q Okay. Thank you. This is David Axe from War is Boring. Can everyone hear me okay?

CAPT. THEBAUD: Who, David Axe? David, I can hear you.

Q Great. Well, I'm looking forward to joining you in a few weeks out there. I plan to fly out in the first week of -- or second week of April and spend about a week. So looking forward to that.

I want to talk about metrics and how we judge APS's success. Inasmuch as it's a capacity-building exercise, how do we measure the results? How do we know if we've successfully built capacity? CAPT. THEBAUD: David, I don't know if you have -- I don't know if -- the question is (metrics ?), and how do we assess and how do we judge. I don't know if you have talked with (Naval Forces ?) Africa yet and had a chance to dialogue with them. I'd really like to table that discussion point and (work ?) that with them.

Because we do run onboard assessments. We do surveys and feedback. But at the strategic level, which I think is probably part of your question, there'd certainly be elements of that, but I think that it would be most appropriate to discuss those at the strategic level with the Naval Forces Europe-Africa staff, if that is okay.

Q All right. Okay. Well, that's fine. Then, moving on --

CAPT. THEBAUD: I -- you know, the assessments that I'm doing -- (inaudible) -- on board here are -- (inaudible) -- operational, tactical. Q Okay.

CAPT. THEBAUD: And just looking -- I think that you're looking more at the strategic level, I am presuming. Q Well, I'm not sure. I'm just wondering, you know, if anyone -- I'm sure someone's thinking in terms of metrics of measuring success for APS. And, you know, I'm just not clear on who that is and what those metrics might be.

CAPT. THEBAUD: Yes. I mean, there are -- there are a number -- as I mentioned -- (inaudible) -- is contracted by the Navy to do assessment work. There are various pulse points that certainly at the -- at the -- also at the -- that Naval Forces Europe and Africa are looking at.

As the tactical commander, in terms of near term -- (audio break) -- it depends on how you want to define success. I think we all recognize that when looking at capability and capacity-building missions, some of the indicators of success are -- (audio cuts off).

Q Hello?

LT. CRAGG: Sorry, ma'am, you dropped off. (Long pause.)

David and Jim, are you still there?

Q I'm still here.

LT. CRAGG: Yeah. The connection might be too -- not good enough to conduct the roundtable.

Q Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: So we'll give it one more shot, and then perhaps if -- you can -- I don't know if we want to do a follow-on, try this again at another, later juncture or -- I'll see if they want to maybe interact with them if you have any follow-on questions. But if you guys want to hang on just one more time -- Q Okay.

LT. CRAGG: And David?

Q Yeah. LT. CRAGG: You can pass that question to me. I can forward it -- forward it to, I believe, to 6th Fleet or -- you know, to try to get an answer for you prior to you going aboard --

Q Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Good morning.

CAPT. THEBAUD: Okay. This is Captain Thebaud. I'm back. Can you guys hear me?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, ma'am.

CAPT. THEBAUD: Okay. So we were talking about metrics and ways of measuring success.

Q Right.

CAPT. THEBAUD: And I have said -- I said that I think that everybody will realistically recognize that, you know, in capacity and capability development missions or initiatives, that one of the challenges that -- (inaudible) -- the indicators will be long term, not near term. But we do a number of assessments, methodologies looking at near-term impact.

Part of is receptivity of partner nations' involvement in a program like this. If people say, "Thanks, not interested. Thanks for stopping by. Appreciate your interest, but we don't want to see you again," clearly, we're not succeeding.

The converse of that is what is being seen here. Last year we had, I believe, on a permanent basis approximately nine or 10 international officers as part of the staff, particularly from Africa. And if my memory serves me correct -- and I think you have the statistics back there -- I wasn't on the deployment last year -- maybe about 20 international officers all told. The multinational participation and interest from various countries' governments and navies has increased markedly, where this year we have, as I mentioned -- (inaudible) -- African countries, we have the addition of Brazil, Denmark is involved, one of our European countries is -- partners is looking at partnership through an ADF (sp) mission later this fall for about six weeks, based on the premise of and the model of Africa Partnership Station, and Naval Forces Europe and Africa has been very instrumental in working with them on developing the program that they will be executing and developing the staff and the training concepts and so on.

So those are all indicators. We have officers who are on the staff this year that participated last year and specifically said to their leadership, hey, we see this as being important, we really want to go back and do this again. The (embarked trainees ?) program has expanded far beyond the number of countries that were involved last year, with trainees, embarked personnel coming on board to conduct -- (inaudible) -- OJT, on-the-job training and engage in dialogue about maritime safety and security issues that are confronting countries all around the coast of Africa, now including Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, possibly involved -- they don't have a confirmation on that. But the interest in the program is definitely increasing. But this year we have three Nigerian officers -- (audio tone). Are you still there?

ANNOUNCEMENT: This conference is scheduled to be disconnected automatically in five minutes. To extend the time, please signal for an operator by pressing star-zero.

LT. CRAGG: Ma'am, I'm going to go ahead and extend the time. Please keep on talking.

CAPT. THEBAUD: Okay. As I was saying, Nigeria's involvement and interest in the program is continuing to build. We have (three ?) officers on board, one of whom is one of my three deputies -- (inaudible) -- the staff.

This year we have been able to bring officers from various countries to Nashville to engage in the training programs, which has broadened the multilateral nature of the actual -- (inaudible) -- which is one of the things that was requested by African partners at the end of deployment -- (inaudible) -- and while we're in one (given ?) place, extend the -- (inaudible) -- breadth of the programs that are being run and then possibly bring officers in from other -- or sailors in from other countries to engage in the training and to make it more multinational.

So those are all indicators and measurements that we are looking at on -- is this program being successful, is it having an impact, is it something that people are interested in participating in?

Resources are clearly an issue for countries working with the maritime challenges in (Western and ?) Central Africa. And you look across the board, bit by bit, the countries are beginning to allocate more resources, whether it's in terms of depot maintenance or finding ways to (secure ?) or obtain additional vessels to help with the response capability.

There are certainly a lot of different things that factor in, and determining correlations versus causal effect is always a challenge, and that's one of the things that (BNA ?) help us with.

Q Thank you very much. I'd like to follow up with a separate question, if I could. Are you learning any -- are you discovering any equipment shortfalls for -- you know, for a soft power kind of mission, or does -- or do you -- you know, does the -- does Nashville already have everything she needs pull off a mission like this? In other words, is this -- maybe we could conceive of this as a somewhat new way of doing things. Have you discovered that our -- that there are systems you might need that, you know, aren't already part of the Navy's amphibious capability? CAPT. THEBAUD: I don't know if you'd put this under a system, but it is. It's a system of how you dialogue with people who speak different languages. I mean, one of the things they always need to be (creative ?) -- which you probably -- (inaudible) -- is interpreters and helping -- we tend of course to consider English as the international language of business and the international language of naval operation/maritime operation. But many of our partners are predominantly Francophone, predominantly Lusophone and Portuguese-speaking. So we work with various resources on translators and having people that can help with the logistics bridge -- the linguistics bridge. I think that is probably the biggest challenge for us in what you'd term the soft power arena or domain.

Q So the challenges are human in nature, rather than technological.

CAPT. THEBAUD: Yes. Yes. I would say for the most part, nationwide, we are continuing to develop our sustainability and also communications in an Internet and e-mail intensive environment, and if I was to tell someone that that doesn't present a challenge, you know, that wouldn't be accurate. It's -- and that's something that the Navy is continuing to build and we talk about frequently.

(Inaudible) -- phone call.

Q Okay. Thank you very much, that's it for me.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Let's turn it over to Chuck please. Not Chuck, I apologize; Jim.

Q Captain Jim Bell with Naval Institute Blog. Can you tell us a little bit about the community relations project your sailors have worked on this deployment?

CAPT. THEBAUD: Absolutely, and one of the things that I think we all see in the human part of this -- and I am also going to go get Lieutenant Commander Chris Survello (sp) from the maritime and civil affairs group, he is a -- (inaudible) -- and is a lead on the community outreach program and he's sharing the outreach programs.

We have continued to work very, very closely with Project Handclasp on donated materials and goods. We've deployed, it's about 240 pallets, roughly, of a variety of donated goods, particularly in the education and health areas.

One of the things that we have been able to do is work closely with our consulates and embassies and USAID and identifying in advance projects in areas in need of assistance that we can provide both engineering and assistance to, whether in terms of renovation and rebuilding of the facility and sprucing up of



facilities, as well as areas that are in need of either health supplies, educational supplies, childcare supplies, the types of things that the Navy traditionally has been involved with.

On our civil affairs team, we have a couple of our partner nation personnel instrumentally involved in that in working with local communities and when we were in Sekondi, in Ghana, the Navy there, the base, in fact, the Navy has a very strong outreach program already in existence, and through coordination with them and our embassy in Accra we were able to identify a number of medical sites, an orphanage and schools to work with, both in terms of material donations and then there were a couple of renovation projects. One of them was in a combined civil-military hospital in the Sekondi region that has had a wing that they have wanted to get refurbished and be able to use as an ICU facility for that clinic.

And so in cooperation with military craftsmen from the naval bases -- (inaudible) -- the Seabees onboard the ship, as well as a number of volunteers from ship's company and the APS staff, did considerable work on renovating the wing of that facility so that they can start making it ready for use as an ICU facility.

It's very much needed in that locale.

One of the other things that worked particularly well in Sekondi is that most of the things they were doing had a direct impact on the local fishing villages, and were seen by local people as relevant to their lives, and helped reconfirm the fact that we were indeed there with an interest in helping to build safety, security and the prospect of achieving upper economic prosperity development in the region, particularly for the fishing villages along the coast.

I'm sectored in Volta Vela (ph) right now. I just walked in. The question first was from Jim Dolbow of Naval Institute blogging about -- (inaudible) -- and HVA project. I talked a little bit about the Project Handclasp material, those types of work. I didn't go exactly into all the -- (inaudible) -- improvement. This was a repeat for you.

CMDR. FITZSIMMONS: Jim, hopefully, I won't repeat what the commodore stated, but we've brought about 235 pallets of Project Handclasp materials. Project Handclasp collects from donors all over the United States, with the specific purpose of using Navy and Marine Corps assets to deliver these humanitarian supplies when we go and do missions worldwide.

One of the things that I think we are the most proud of this year versus years past is that we really feel like we are responding to the needs of the -- (inaudible) -- country teams and the host nation navies and we're supporting their navy outreach efforts. Whereas maybe in years past, we kind of took the flag, as to what we thought we should bring down, this year we're really -- our program is really mature, in that we have responded to direct requests. And we continue to push our knowledge for future ships and for future APS missions when they come to the region.

But we hope that that number will continue to grow. You know, as I'm sure the commodore and others have said, the main mission is maritime safety and security, but a by-product of that and a real tertiary benefit is our ability to do community outreach, while at the same time building maritime safety and security.

And we've done that through the distribution of the Handclasp material. We've done that through our community outreach projects, which we've used five Seabee -- a five-man Seabee team. Each -- (inaudible) -- 20 sailors each day, and we've done one or two projects in each of the ports that we've visited. Our Seabees will -- and the -- (inaudible) -- will start tomorrow at a primary school on the Navy base that supports the maritime community around the Navy base.

We just finished two projects in Ghana and we have others planned for the rest of the visit and then kind of taking it one step further, we've brought with us a DOD medical outreach team that also is in direct response to some of the requests that we've received during -- (inaudible) -- Ft. McHenry and some of the other ships that the commodore some -- commodore and others have been a part of. But we really feel like we're really responding to the needs of the community that we're trying to build partnerships in.

CAPT. THEBAUD: The other aspect that we continue was from last year, that was very, very impressive and very well-received, was a team of 14 medical professionals from Project Hope that met us in Sekondi and stayed with us during the duration of the time in -- (inaudible) -- and did work -- (inaudible) -- in a local community, in the hospitals -- (inaudible) -- as well as -- (inaudible) -- military clinics in the region, doing critical work -- (inaudible) -- advisors to some of the young health professionals in the town.

CMDR. FITZSIMMONS: Thank you so much, that was great responses to my question and you stole my next question, which was the relationship with Project Hope.

I just have one last question and it's a softball. Can you tell us a little about Ghana's independence day celebrations?

CAPT. THEBAUD: One of the highlights of my time in Ghana, we had the opportunity to participate in three major events. The first one was the evening before independence day on the 6th of March, was a -- (inaudible) -- independence celebration in the town of Etabato (ph). The -- (inaudible) -- for Etabato (ph), the naval base is on the traditional -- on the traditional land of the -- of that -- of that community, and so the base has maintained its strong relationship with the town of Etabato (ph) and -- (inaudible) -- from Etabato (ph). And apparently last year when the Ft. McHenry was there, they had participated in the independence day celebration there and the band -- or our band that we have embarked from the Sixth Fleet had participated. And when -- (inaudible) -- found out that we were going to be back in town, quickly contacted us and said, you know, if we could come and help and support our independence day celebration. And it was a series of speeches involving the importance of the region in the independence movement, the importance of independence to the people of Ghana and an urging for the young people not to forget what their parents and their elders had been through to achieve the independence milestones over the years. Also, talked about how Ghana serves as a -- (inaudible) -- beacon, particularly for other countries in Africa, and indeed, the rest of the free world through the independence movement over the years that Ghana has achieved. Our band was there playing at a joint combined band with the Ghanaian navy band, very, very well received, also, some other music and dance troupes that were there and the villagers -- the people of the village were all down at the town circle -- (inaudible) -- circle, also talked about the independence circle and the importance of the various landmarks and

locations in Etabato (ph), which was a very, very moving evening from my perspective. A lot of enthusiasm from the people of the town.

The next day, the commanding officer of (National ?) and I were invited to join the reviewing party of the western region independence day parade. Ghana has 10 regions and there is always -- every year there's a national parade in Accra and a formal parade in each region. These parades highlight the security services of Ghana, as well as education efforts and achievements of the children of Ghana.

So it was a combined parade that featured all of the armed services, as well as the other security services in Ghana, police, immigration, customs, fire service, everybody that's involved in security of the community. There were also some -- (inaudible) -- looking very, very (strict ?) and very professional and we joked that we don't think we would find that in the U.S. And they were right there, very, very supportive of the security requirements of the country and then many school groups, again, precision marching and about a two hour parade in the center of town and then at the end of the parade, a recognition of what I would essentially say is the valedictorians of various academic programs as comparable for us to junior high and high school levels and recognizing excellence in academic achievement within the Western region.

And finally, remarks from the minister who was recently appointed following elections earlier this year and then in the evening was a reception at the minister's residence in the western region.

Probably more details than you wanted.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, ma'am, for going over that. Chuck or David, do you have any follow on questions, I mean, Jim or David.

Q That's all for me. Thank you. Q I have one last question if there's time. LT. CRAGG: Yes. Please go ahead.

Q Captain, are you working with the Naval War College at all for higher level training at the officer corps in the navies that you have visited?

CAPT. THEBAUD: Naval War College, again, there's probably something that you should ask some additional questions to Naval Forces Europe -- (inaudible) -- Naval Forces Europe/Africa has worked with the Navy War College on development initiatives for APS. I have had contact in the deployment with some of the -- (inaudible) -- colleges in the country, and we have visited and talked with them about maritime security with their faculty, talked about maritime security APS initiatives.

There is not a formal aspect of working with either the Navy War College in the U.S. or the (commanding staff ?) or defense universities of the countries that we're in right now that I'm aware of.

Q Okay. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you. I believe, ma'am, that's it from the bloggers as far as it relates to their questions.

So with that, I want to turn it back over to you if you'd like to end with a closing statement.

CAPT. THEBAUD: There was a comment here from one of my personnel. You want to make sure that --

LT. CRAGG: I'll just e-mail them the correct spelling of everybody's name.

CAPT. THEBAUD: Oh, Lieutenant -- Lieutenant Foster (sp), she would e-mail you the correct spelling of everybody's name so you that had that.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you. I will pass it to -- (inaudible).

CAPT. THEBAUD: (Inaudible) -- from your perspective.

CMDR. FITZSIMMONS: Look, if I might just say that -- (inaudible) -- some issues that are -- (inaudible) -- absolutely delighted to be a part of what was a very significant program down here. I think the groupings we have worked exceptionally well together, certainly, from my role as director of staff; it's a great privilege to be able to see so many diverse nations working alongside each other. We've been working that way since we came together in Naples back in November. A lot of great friendships springing up, a lot of very interesting discussions taking place in part of our formal work together and very much importantly as well as part of the socializing we all do as a group and it's working extremely well and we're forming some very good relationships and I think it's paying similar significant dividends. Q Jen, this is Doug High. Is David Ax still on the line?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, Doug.

Q David, just wanted to say hi and sure hope we can work something out for a good loan, appreciate you hanging with us.

Q Yeah, actually, I think we'll be fine as long as there's no problems on your end. Gabon is somewhat of a less tricky logistics challenge, so, yeah, I think we'll be fine.

Q Great. Well, we'll stay close and look forward to it.

Q Me, too.

CAPT. THEBAUD: Okay. In closing, from my perspective, I was able to come down to a variety of weapons -- (inaudible) -- on a smaller APS mission with USS Elrod last fall. And again, the synergy is continuing to build. There is definitely a recognition -- (inaudible) -- in most of the communities that we visit that APS is not -- there are some countries where for logistics reasons and so on we frequent more often than others. But everybody with whom I have come in contact with has been very excited about the APS mission, the potential that it holds and comments repeatedly this isn't going to end. We need to keep these sorts of activities and events and (vibrant ?) projects moving forward, and I think that is the most constant theme I would say that I have seen -- learned in places -- (inaudible).

LT. CRAGG: With that, thank you, ma'am, for that closing statement. And I want to also thank the bloggers who joined us today. I appreciate it. And a note to everyone on the line, today's call will be available on the defense link on the bloggers' side, as well as the transcript and the audio file and bios.

If you have any more follow on questions, please let me know via e-mail and again, ma'am, thank you very much for joining us today on DodLive Bloggers Roundtable for March 18th.

This ends today's Bloggers Roundtable.

END.